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AUTHOR	Conescu, Rachel; Lewis, Anne; Mackinnon, Ann; Weissberg, Alan
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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the following six programs designed to improve education and employment preparation for adolescents and funded by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds: (1) High Schools that Work, a national initiative that assists more than 1,000 high schools in 22 states as they upgrade their rigor and improve their quality of instruction; (2) the Career Academy Support Network that assists in the development of career academies--small, thematically-focused schools that integrate academic and career curricula, give personal support to students, and create linkages with employers; (3) Communities and Schools for Career Success builds connections between schools and communities to provide career-related experiences for young people; (4) Benchmark Communities Initiative provides project- and work-based learning experiences for students, integrates academic and career-related curricula, and helps school systems assess student progress; (5) National Youth Corps Training Program of the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps offers work experience, education, skills training and counseling to low-income young people ages 16 -25 who have left school with inadequate skills; and (6) YouthBuild Affiliated Network provides technical assistance and training to 70 local programs that voluntarily pledge to meet high standards of quality. The program descriptions include an outline of the distinctive features of the program model; a closer look at the people involved; and lessons learned. (KC)

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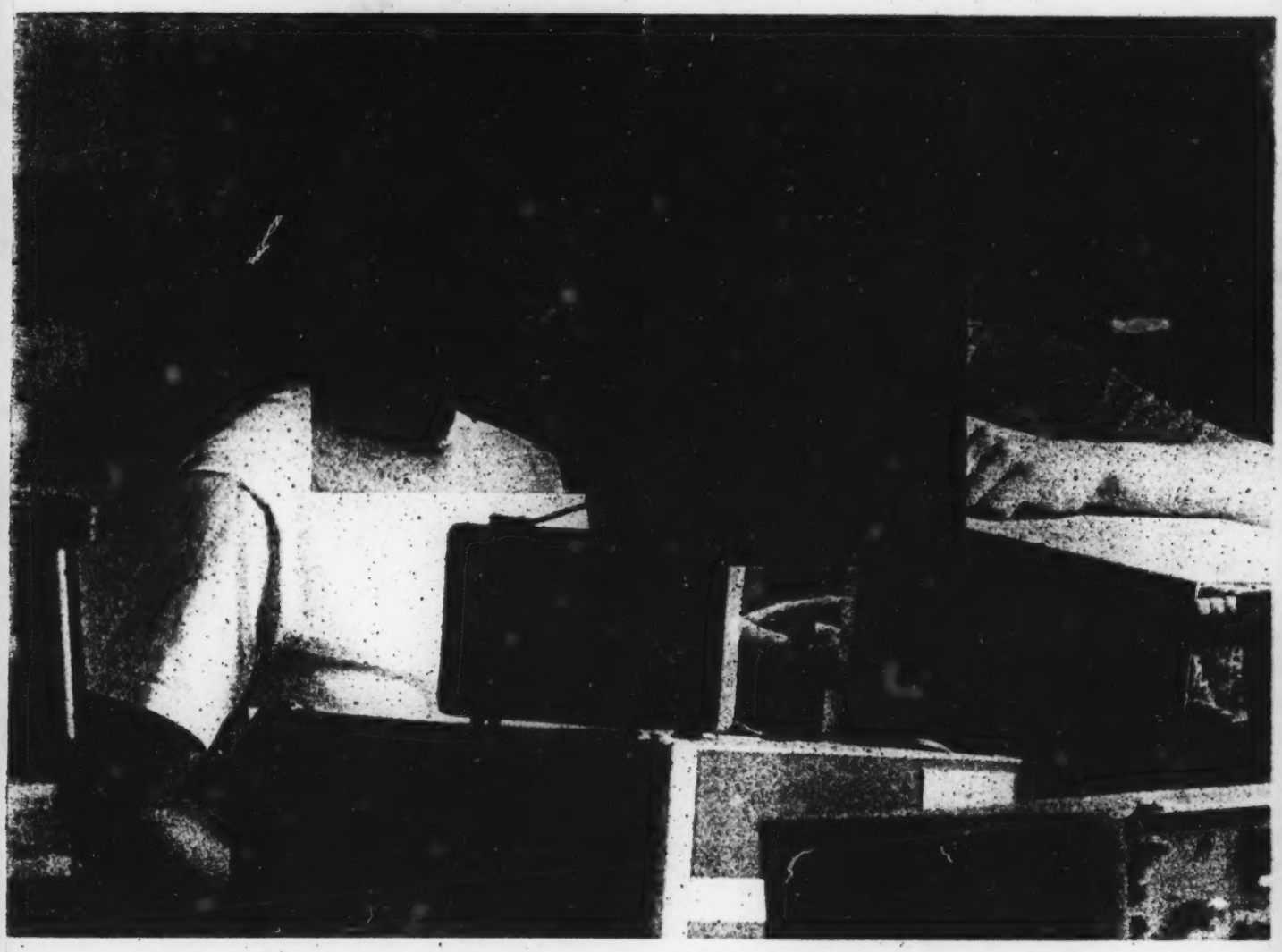
New Rules, New Roles:

Preparing All Young People for a Changing World



DeWitt Wallace Reader's Digest Fund

A Report on Career Exploration and Preparation for Young People

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Mission Statement

The Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds seek to enrich community life through support of education, arts and culture.

The Funds wish to acknowledge the many individuals who assisted in the preparation of this document. Special thanks to Rachel Conescu, Anne Lewis, Ann Mackinnon and Alan Weissberg, who served as writers and editors, and to the directors of the six projects.

Fall 2000

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Preparing All Young People for a Changing World

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New Rules, New Roles:
Preparing All Young People for a Changing World

Youth Who Can

- It is June in a Brighton High School chemistry class in Boston, Massachusetts, a time when most juniors are thinking about the summer. This class is thinking about peanuts—hydroponically grown peanuts. These inner-city students are participating in a partnership with Tuskegee University and the National Aeronautical and Space Administration. As they examine whether nitrogen-fixing crops can be grown in a water-based medium, the young scientists maintain regular contact with Tuskegee's science faculty. "We're learning teamwork, leadership and analysis," one student explains.

- Ten years ago, Randolph County Vocational Technical Center in Elkins, West Virginia, was considered a dumping ground for "failing students." Undaunted, the school staff, parents and students devised a program where students get the support they need to succeed. Today, three out of four students meet the school's ambitious reading goals and two out of three meet its science and math goals. The dropout rate has plummeted.

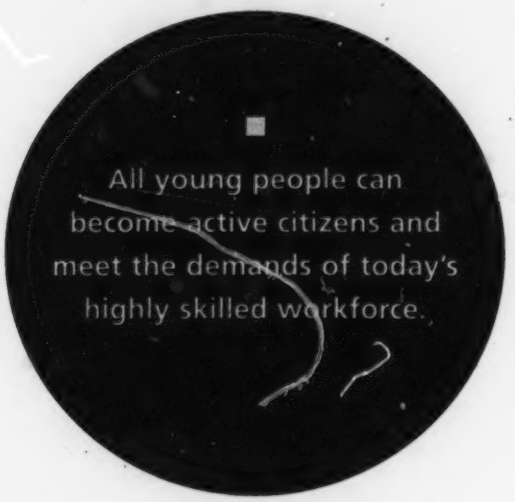
- Eight years ago, the youth corps movement in Colorado consisted of a handful of Denver neighborhoods providing summer job experiences for a few dozen young people who had left school with few employable skills. Today, nine operating youth corps run a $3 million program for several hundred unskilled youth throughout the state, on projects ranging from building and construction to environmental protection. One young woman who had never been outside the Denver city limits wrote in the summer of 1998, "When the sun sinks beneath the western horizon...I look up and I am able to see 20 other team members working as much as me, working with every muscle and every ounce of strength they have, all for one common good: to protect, to stand firm, and to aid the natural areas of our community."

Given the opportunity to be challenged intellectually and engaged in their communities, all youth can become active citizens and meet the demands of today's high skilled workforce. Too often, however, young people do not have access to learning experiences that develop their skills and interests. This monograph describes six projects that are transforming the quality of education and training for young people in the adolescent years. They have demonstrated that schools and training institutions can meet the challenge of helping young people, especially those from low-income communities, make a successful transition to adulthood.

Since 1992, total support for these six projects from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund amounted to more than $40 million.

Career Exploration and Preparation Projects:

- HIGH SCHOOLS THAT WORK is a national initiative that assists over 1,000 high schools in 22 states as they upgrade the rigor and improve the quality of instruction in high schools. The program is led by the Southern Regional Education Board, based in Atlanta, Georgia.



- THE CAREER ACADEMY SUPPORT NETWORK assists in the development of career academies—small, thematically-focused schools that integrate academic and career curricula, give personal support to students, and create linkages with employers. The network is led by the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley.

- COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS FOR CAREER SUCCESS (CS^2) builds connections between schools and communities to provide career-related experiences for young people. CS^2 is a project of the Corporation for Business, Work and Learning, based in Boston, Massachusetts.

- BENCHMARK COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE provides engaging project- and work-based learning experiences for students, integrates academic and career-related curricula, and helps school systems assess student progress. It is conducted by Jobs for the Future, based in Boston, Massachusetts.

- NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM (NTP) OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE AND CONSERVATION CORPS (NASCC) helps young people ages 16-24 who have left school without the skills they need to continue their education or obtain jobs. NTP trains staff of local Youth Corps located in more than 100 communities nationwide.

- YOUTHBUILD AFFILIATED NETWORK provides technical assistance and training to 70 local YouthBuild programs that voluntarily pledge to meet high standards of quality. The network is organized by YouthBuild USA, based in Somerville, Massachusetts.

While these six initiatives share several common elements and approaches, they address different target groups of adolescents and different institutions: the first four focus on youth who are in high school; the

other two concentrate on youth who have left school with inadequate skills, and participate in employment programs operated by community-based organizations. All have developed strategies to help young people gain greater control over their futures in a highly competitive economy. They have also learned to take complex program designs to scale, affecting hundreds of schools and youth-serving organizations across the country.

The individuals who lead these programs have taken their cue from the workplace. The rules that govern success for workers have changed in recent decades and these changes have particular importance for young workers who are struggling to get their first jobs. They will need higher level skills than workers in the past. Furthermore, some post-secondary education is a requirement for most well-paying jobs and for opportunities for advancement. If young people are going to be prepared to make a successful transition from school to work at a level where they can thrive, the institutions that provide their education and training must change significantly.

New Rules for Young People

In the next decade, the number of 20 to 24 year-olds searching for jobs and training opportunities will increase by 21 percent. Job opportunities are also expected to expand dramatically; over 11 million new jobs have been created since 1992 alone.

But the demands of these jobs are changing. Today, six out of every ten new jobs are designated for "skilled workers." According to Richard Murnane and Frank Levy, authors of *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, employers now demand a variety of skills not necessarily required 20 years ago. These include the ability to read and to do math at the ninth-grade level or higher, solve complex problems, work in groups with people of varied backgrounds, communicate effectively in writing and orally, and use personal computers. High-tech and management positions are increasing; conversely, labor-intensive positions in manufacturing and related industries are declining.

Shifting trends in our nation's population suggest that many youths will be ill-equipped to enter post-secondary education and this highly skilled marketplace. By the year 2005, six out of every ten of the 3.4 million new young adults in our country will be either Hispanic or non-white—groups whose members are typically less well served by public education and more likely to face discrimination in the workplace. Many young people about to enter the workforce have just left welfare. And an increasing percentage of young adults are not native-born. In 1996, for example, more than one of every five young adults with fewer than twelve years of schooling was an immigrant. These factors underline the urgency of the work that is described in this monograph to sharply upgrade the quality of education and training for these youths.

New Rules for Youth-Serving Institutions

Unfortunately, few high schools have made the necessary changes. With the exception of the Hispanic population, a higher percentage of students nationwide are graduating from high school. However, the skill levels of American adolescents reported on national and international assessments have been disappointing.

Most of our nation's high schools prepare their students according to yesterday's workforce demands. Most, especially those serving low-income youth, continue to operate on the assumption that a comprehensive program with minimum expectations is all a young person needs to make the transition from school to a job or post-secondary education. Meanwhile, youth employment programs assume that short-term, narrowly focused vocational training can make up for a young person's failure to succeed in the formal education system. Neither view recognizes changes under way nor the challenges young people face as they enter today's workforce.

Many employers place little faith in high school transcripts. A 1998 policy statement from the Committee for Economic Development cites a recent survey showing that only four percent of business leaders believe public schools are doing a good job of preparing young people for the workplace. Of special concern is the employment rate for non-white youth, which is 20 to 30 percent lower than for whites.

Yet incrementally, there has been a shift in public will to improve the prospects of its increasingly disenfranchised youth. The federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act, passed in 1994 and scheduled to expire in 2001, formalized the goal of establishing a transition system to move students from school to careers by helping states develop plans and fund local initiatives. Many of the programs established are being incorporated into new federal legislation, such as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which requires communities that receive funds to establish youth development boards, and the Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act. States are also adopting legislation and policies to advance the goal of creating a transition system for youth.

Much has been learned in recent years. Schools and other youth-serving institutions need to adopt new rules of their own if they are to help young people become prepared for the higher skill levels required in the today's workplace. They must:

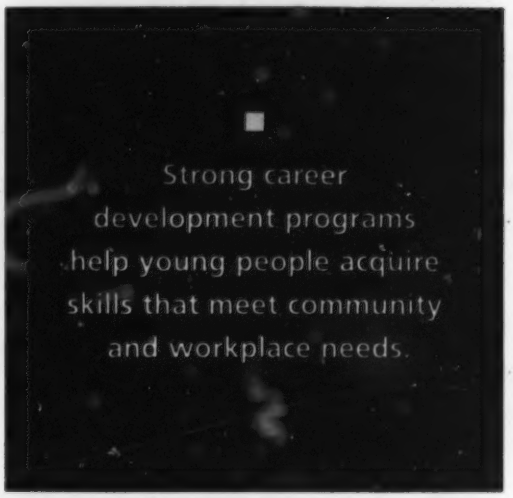
- COMBINE RIGOROUS ACADEMIC WORK WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO APPLY WHAT THEY ARE LEARNING. Learning by doing—whether it takes place in school, through integrated academic and vocational programs or school-based projects, or in the community, through internships or community service—helps young people apply and understand the relevance of their learning to the real world outside the classroom and to their own futures.

- **Recruit and prepare staff members who understand the needs of young people and are committed to their career development.** The most successful schools and programs select personnel carefully and provide them with ongoing professional development, including opportunities to learn about youth development, the workplace and post-secondary education and to interact with employers and college educators.

- **Create partnerships among schools, youth-serving organizations, employers, and post-secondary institutions, then link those partnerships to larger state and federal reform efforts.** Partnerships help schools and youth programs understand the challenges faced by young people, while also helping students understand what will be expected of them. By linking their own work with that of broader reform efforts, local programs can take better advantage of available funding opportunities.

- **Constantly evaluate progress and use the information to make improvements.** A willingness to assess and improve is essential in today's workplace and should be a core value of institutions responsible for preparing young people for the future.

Today, policymakers at every level acknowledge that workplaces have changed and that schools need to catch up. Current school reforms are beginning to address the issue of rigor within the schools. At the same time, many schools and agencies are strengthening career development programs that enable young people to acquire skills that are useful and needed in their communities and future workplaces. Isolated efforts at school-to-work transitions have expanded and linked together. Although they have not evolved into the system envisioned by education



reformers, most are richer and more carefully designed than they were a decade ago.

What follows is a description of the six programs supported by the DeWittWallace-Reader's Digest Fund. These models approach their work differently, yet they add up to a clear message: young people, especially those who struggle in the traditional education system, can move assuredly into the future if their schools and training organizations prepare them with thoughtful, connected and challenging experi-

ences. We need to help schools and other institutions provide these experiences and to hold them accountable for doing so.

Profiles

For more than a decade, fostering "fundamental improvement in the quality of educational and career development opportunities for all school-age youth" was an important focus of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. Career development strategies were identified from promising practice and research; programs were supported for long periods of time—usually for four or more years—to permit new learning to emerge and be applied. The grants were large enough to affect a significant number of schools and community-based organizations. They encouraged the reallocation of resources, both human and financial, to the new services. In order to assure wider dissemination of this work, the Funds sought to foster collaboration across researchers, policymakers, and program leaders.

Each of the major career development programs is led by a national or regional intermediary organization capable of assisting local sites with planning, assessment, and implementation. They enhance the skills of the adults, both leaders and staff, who work with young people through training and technical assistance. They take the program beyond discrete local sites to a national audience of practitioners and policymakers.

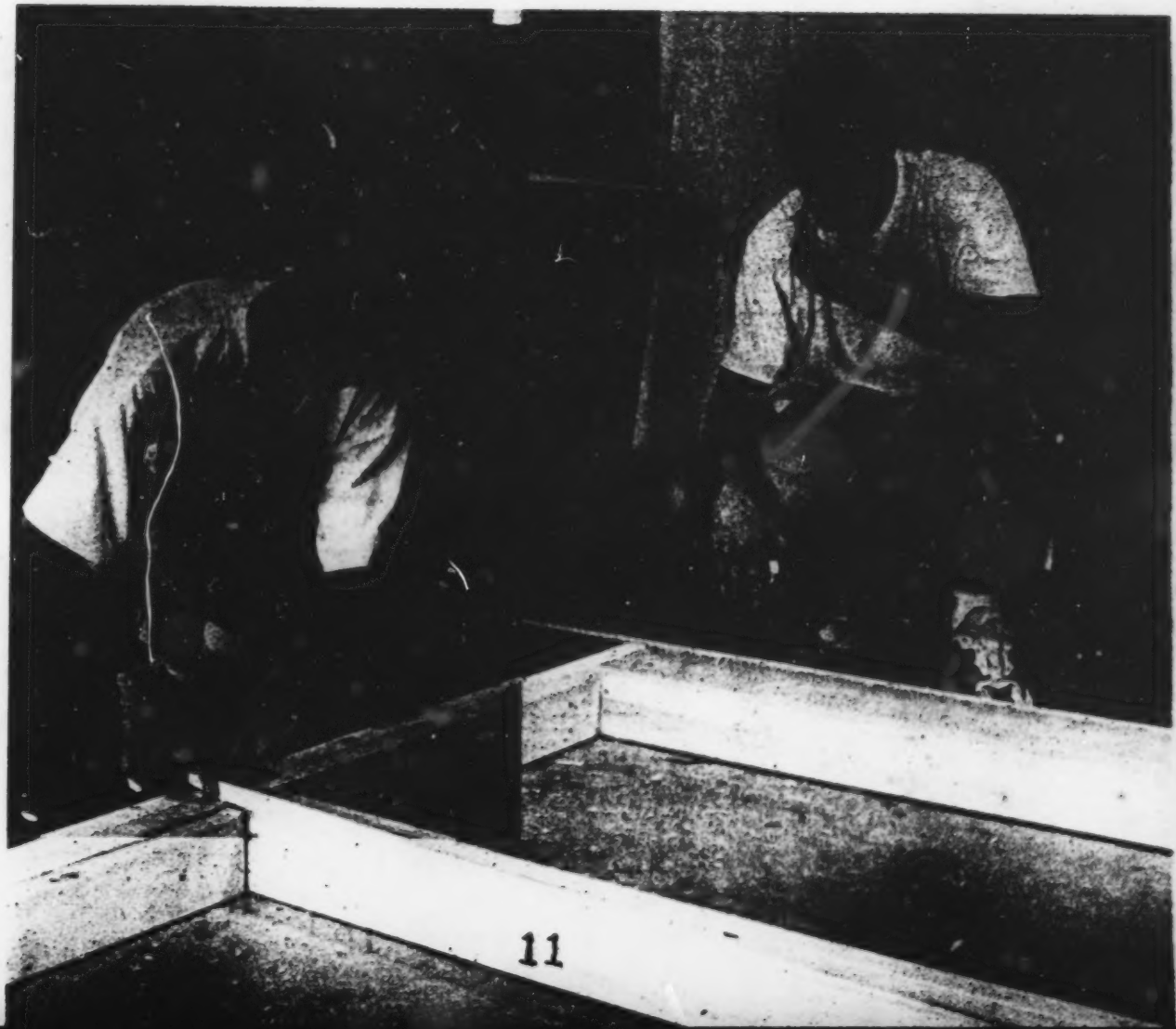
The following program descriptions include:

- An outline of the distinctive features of the program model.
- A closer look at the people involved.
- Lessons that should be helpful in developing similar programs or refining existing ones.

Individually and as a group, the portraits reveal how far some schools and youth-serving organizations have come in realizing a comprehensive school-to-career transition system, and how far we have left to go.

High Schools That Work

Southern Regional Education Board



If all we do is enroll students in more rigorous courses but do not get beyond drill sheets and do not require students to do work outside class or give them extra help, we will see very little change in achievement...We need to unlock the system from practices that enable schools to sort students and instead design schools that teach almost all students to very high standards, engaging them in solid effort in and out of class.

Gene Bottoms
Senior Vice President
Southern Regional Education Board

The Southern Regional Education Board's High Schools That Work initiative has demonstrated that we can teach more students at higher levels by blending challenging academic courses and quality career studies in ways that motivate students to learn. So effective is this approach that the West Virginia state legislature, during my term as governor, created Jobs Through Education, a program that incorporates many of HSTW's principles.

Gaston Caperton
President, The College Board and
former Governor of West Virginia

High Schools That Work (HSTW) is a national initiative that helps high schools strengthen and integrate their academic and vocational programs, enabling all students to pursue a rigorous and engaging college-preparatory curriculum. Now working with more than 1,000 schools in 22 states, HSTW provides on-site technical assistance, staff development, and materials on curriculum and school improvement. HSTW also trains staff from state departments of education to provide technical assistance to schools and assists states in analyzing and upgrading their high school graduation requirements. HTSW is an initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board, an Atlanta-based consortium of 16 Southern states that is dedicated to increasing the competitiveness of state economies by improving the quality of education.

In 1987, the Southern Regional Education Board launched High Schools That Work (HSTW) to improve education through more rigorous instruction in math, science, language arts, and technology. Initially implemented in a few dozen pilot schools, by 1998 the program had reached more than 800 schools in 22 states.

The impressive growth of the program is matched by the expansion of its influence within schools. Begun with a focus on "career-bound" students—those perceived as having little chance of going to a four-year college—HSTW has become a model for total school change, giving students in regular and vocational programs access to a more rigorous core curriculum, supporting them in meeting higher standards, and recognizing their efforts.

Essential Components

The HSTW model includes a set of essential components to improve student learning:

- All students take courses in math, science, and language arts that are taught at college preparatory levels.
- Students also take career or technical courses, which integrate high academic standards and demonstrate the connection between what students do in school and their goals for future education and careers.
- Students who complete three of the four curriculum goals and meet performance standards in

reading, math, and science are eligible for the Award of Educational Achievement, a proof to employers and postsecondary institutions that the recipient performed well in academically rigorous courses.

- Teachers engage students in completing challenging assignments that are connected to real-life problems.
- Everyone—parents, teachers, counselors, and students—supports high expectations. Students are expected to catch up if they enter high school unprepared and to take advanced math and/or science in their senior year. Extra help is provided by teachers, tutors, and families.
- Schools provide a supportive guidance system that helps students and their families focus on completing a rigorous high school program and preparing for further education.
- Teachers from academic and vocational areas work and plan together to make their courses more relevant to students' needs.
- When students work, their employers are encouraged to monitor their school performance and to reinforce academic skills in the workplace.

Studies of HSTW sites have found that the initiative has been successful in getting schools to increase significantly the number of students taking college-prep level courses in English, math and science. Other HSTW research shows that a key to success is high-quality professional development. The most improved sites provide staff development that is focused, ongoing, and consistent with the goals of the school. HSTW is now emphasizing greater on-site technical assistance.

Real Life Portrait: West Virginia Students Who Can

When Glen Karlen was principal of Randolph County Vocational Technical Center in Elkins, West Virginia, he often heard teachers describe their 800 students

as "kids who can't." The center had become a dumping ground for low-achieving students from its three feeder high schools. Karlen, now superintendent of the county school system, applied for an HSTW grant in hopes of turning the school around. In the first blush of enthusiasm after receiving the grant, his staff tried to do everything at once. It was overwhelming.

A defining moment came when teachers recognized that the technical manuals used at the center, written at a 12th grade reading level or higher, were much too difficult for low-performing students. Staff at the high schools and the center decided together to adopt a collaborative goal: improving the reading skills of all students. This led to higher expected outcomes from students and related efforts to improve teaching skills that would help students to perform better. The high schools eventually eliminated low-level requirements, such as "general" and "basic" English, and raised graduation requirements.

As a result of HSTW training, the center's vocational curriculum was changed to reflect industry standards. Career clusters were added to provide sequential courses in particular career fields and emphasize project-based learning. Students and parents became more involved in planning. Today, every student who enrolls at the center is assigned to an advisor who stays with that student throughout high school. Other supports are in place so students cannot fail. For example, a student who receives a low grade in a course returns to that teacher to make up work and participate in "reteach sessions."

Business and community leaders advise the school on setting goals and designing the curriculum. They also provide work-based learning experiences for about 150 students a semester. High school and vocational center teachers attend HSTW-related workshops and conferences together. SREB also assisted the county in organizing a series of skills academies, held during the summer, to help academic and vocational teachers adopt a more challenging curriculum. Because of these workshops and academies, the county's schools have implemented block scheduling, upgraded their vocational curriculum, and implemented the "Zeroes Aren't Permitted" (ZAP) program, which ensures that all assignments are completed correctly each day. The professional development, says Karlen, has given the teachers "a tremendous boost."

Eight years after the center became an HSTW site, more than seventy-five percent of its students met the program's reading goal and about 66 percent met science and math goals. More students were taking college entrance tests and doing better on them. Average daily attendance increased four percentage points (to 95 percent), and the dropout rate declined dramatically.

Karlen anticipates that the changes adopted because of the HSTW initiative will become the norm in Randolph County. Improvement on this scale "requires patience and school-wide support," he says, but commitment to goals and methodical effort have paid off.

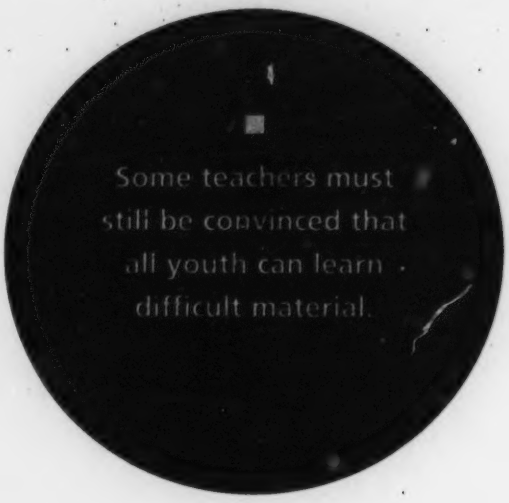
Assessing Progress and Meeting Challenges

Ongoing evaluation has played a key role in the success of HSTW and is one of the major reasons it was one of only three comprehensive school reform pro-

grams cited as having research evidence of effectiveness in a 1999 American Institutes for Research report. Data on the program come from several sources. Every two years, HSTW assesses the performance of high school seniors completing career/technical concentrations at its sites, based on the reading, math, and science components of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The program also examines student transcripts and surveys students and teachers. Another source of information is the more than 100 technical assistance visits to schools annually, where HSTW teams meet with students, teachers, school leaders and community representatives. Sites receive detailed reports after the visits, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, to guide school improvement.

In 1998, the sites that had been in the network for at least two years showed clear gains in math, reading, and science. Average NAEP achievement scores were up, and more students were enrolled in challenging math and science courses. Female students exceeded the math goal, improving by 17 points, and African-American students improved by 20 points in math. The percentage of students who qualified for the HSTW Award of Educational Achievement increased from 17 percent in 1996 to 25 percent in 1998.

Despite these gains, HSTW director Gene Bottoms says the challenge remains to persuade teachers that "most all youth can learn difficult material" if they set high expectations and provide support. Better professional development is essential, he says, "but we also must design systems that make success possible for all students." These systems need to include individual assistance and support, a curriculum more relevant to student interests, and improved instructional strategies. Another priority is to improve the quality of career and technical education students receive.



At the school and district levels, HSTW staff identify and focus on specific areas that need improvement, supporting them with targeted staff development, materials, and planning. At the state level, HSTW trains education departments to put less emphasis on compliance monitoring and more on improving schools. The program also helps state and federal leaders to write policies that encourage more rigorous educational standards, both academic and vocational. This work is showing results. When the program

began, only one state in the region required algebra for high school graduation. Now, every state in the SREB network requires it, and at least one-third require geometry. West Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia have eliminated the general track, requiring instead that all students take college-preparatory courses or choose a career concentration.

Bottoms credits a $2.8 million grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund in 1992 with moving High Schools That Work beyond an experimental phase and into full implementation. A 1998 grant of $2.5 million from the Fund is enabling the program to prepare states for a more active role in educational reform and to enlarge the network, especially in urban districts where the Mott Foundation is also supporting SREB's work. Recently, HSTW was awarded $12 million by the U.S. Department of Education to expand further and link middle schools with its work in high schools in rural areas.

Career Academy Support Network

Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley

We became interested in career academies after we did some evaluation. We did not go into that research as advocates for career academies. We were impressed with what we found and have been with everything revealed since. There are not too many strategies for reform where you can point to six or eight studies by different people and they all show good results.

DAVID STERN
Principal Investigator,
Career Academy Support Network

California Academies are an outstanding example of education/business collaboration. They provide a rigorous, academically rich school-to-career program for high school students. The Davis administration supports their expansion in California.

GARY HART
California Secretary of Education

Career academies are small schools, usually located within larger high schools, organized around a career theme such as health care or banking. They offer a college-preparatory curriculum and provide extensive and sustained contact between teachers and students, and career-related offsite learning experiences. The first academies were established in Philadelphia during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Career Academy Support Network, based at the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, assists schools, districts, and states in developing career academies. An evaluation of career academies by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, located in New York City, is generating useful information about their impact on students' educational, behavioral, and job-related outcomes.

The contemporary career academy is not a new concept. Philadelphia opened one in 1969, and California began its network of career academies with two sites in 1981. In the 1990s, the academy caught on widely as a strategy for making high schools more rigorous and personal. One recent study estimates that career academies now number between 1,000 and 3,000, depending on how the term is defined. Today, one source of assistance for creating or improving career academies is the Career Academy Support Network (CASN), based at the University of California, Berkeley. The network's academies are among those being studied by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), which has released three reports so far in its decade-long evaluation of the career academies and their impact on students.

Essential Components

According to MDRC and CASN, career academies have three important characteristics in common:

- A career academy is a school-within-a-school, in which clusters of students share several classes every day and have some or all of the same teachers from year to year. The number of students is relatively small—usually 150-300—and the teachers work as a team and share in decision making.
- The curriculum combines and integrates academic and career-related subjects. Academic courses meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements; career-related courses center on a broadly defined career theme such as health, electronics, or travel.
- Local employers are involved as partners and serve on an advisory board. A coordinator typically serves as liaison among employers, the academy, and the school district. Employers contribute financial or in-kind support—but more important, they become involved in the life of the school by providing speakers, mentors, internships, and other forms of work-based learning.

Career academies are popular for two reasons, according to David Stern of CASN. First, although some academies serve a broad range of students, they seem to be especially helpful for students who don't perform well in a traditional high school setting. Studies in California and Philadelphia, where career academies have existed long enough to provide cumulative data, show that academy students do significantly better than comparison group students on attendance, credits toward graduation, grade-point average, graduation rate, and college attendance. In California, where academies must present individual student performance data to receive state funding, the vast majority of students have been meeting the requirements. There, a minimum of 80 percent attendance and 90 percent of credits are required for on-time graduation.

Second, career academies are compatible with the goals of the larger high school reform movement. For school-to-career programs and policies to survive, they must link with the demand for higher academic standards, according to Robert Schwartz, head of Achieve, Inc., a standards and assessment collaborative of states and businesses. Career academies seem to be doing just that. Plus, their school-within-a-school organization allows academies to work as wedges for changing whole schools, bringing personal support, integration of academic and career curricula, and applied learning to the larger institution. According to Stern, "more educators are recognizing that a career academy is not primarily a job training program, but a comprehensive approach to curriculum, pedagogy, and school organization that can bridge the old gulf between academic and vocational." In fact there are high schools throughout the country that have converted entirely to a career academy structure.

Career academies can help change a whole school by encouraging a thematic approach to curriculum, pedagogy and school organization.

With a $1.3 million grant from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the Career Academy Support Network is strengthening the implementation of academies in Atlanta, Oakland, and the state of Illinois. Drawing on findings by MDRC and other groups, as well as the extensive experience of practitioners, CASN is training districts and state education departments to provide the necessary support for creating and improving career academies within their schools. In addition to direct assistance, CASN is developing a website listing useful guides and materials. In Atlanta, where CASN is working closely with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the

career academies could eventually become models for SREB's urban initiative. The Illinois project, which now has 50 career academies in operation, draws on CASN experience in California, where more than 200 academies featuring 25 career fields are functioning.

Real Life Portrait: The "Family" at Independence High

Awards night at Independence Electronics Academy in San Jose, California, was anything but hum-drum. Students and their parents milled around tables of food, which had been set up by teachers in a room decorated by the students. Each time a student was called up for an award, the audience "whooped it up," recalled Tony Stieber. "It was fabulous." Before they got to Independence, most of these students had not been expected to do well in school. In fact, the California statute on career academies requires that two-thirds of students enrolling in an academy must meet three of four criteria: low attendance, low achievement, low motivation, and low family income.

The 100-student academy, founded in 1985, nestles inside one of the three "villas" of the 4,000-student Independence High School, a sprawling campus on 100 acres in the Eastside Union School District of San Jose. Four teachers—covering English, science, math, and electronics—teach the students during their three years at the academy. The classes are small, and the teachers have time during the week for planning and administrative duties. Beginning in 10th grade, the students progress through a rigorous academic program; by the time they're seniors, they are taking English IV and Electronics III and finishing up their work in chemistry or physics and Algebra II. School doesn't begin until 8 a.m., but teachers open their classrooms an hour or more earlier—and students always show up to do homework or special projects.

During their three years, the students progress through a series of career experiences arranged with the academy's business partners. Stieber, for example, is one of two industry liaisons to local academies. On loan from his work as a marketing director at Hewlett-Packard, his tasks include organizing career days, recruiting a mentor for each 11th grader, developing summer job opportunities, and arranging on-site visits by personnel from Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Siemens, Compaq, and other school partners. The big plus of having electronics industry professionals come to the academy, he says, is to help students understand "that there are other adults interested in them." Stieber also manages a website for students, parents, teachers, and partners that has become a resource for other career academies across the country.

Stieber is impressed by the teachers' dedication and their "deep knowledge" of the students. "Company executives sign up to support the academy because they generally believe in working for the betterment of their communities," he said. "They see the academy as helping young people become successful." The

academy has placed graduates in full-time jobs with partner industries, where Stieber reports they have become "well-respected workers." Telephone surveys indicate that a large percentage of graduates have enrolled in post-secondary education. Recently, while planning a career event for students and parents from three high schools, Stieber noticed the way the academy students took charge, composed skits, and carried through on the arrangements. He believes that the academy, which students call their "family," has given them the confidence and opportunity to become leaders.

Assessing Progress and Meeting Challenges

MDRC began its ten-year study of career academies in 1993, before the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act cited academies as a desirable approach. The study, supported from the beginning by the Funds and a consortium of other sources, follows a rigorous research strategy. High school students who apply to one of the participating academies are assigned randomly to either the academy or a control group within the larger school, thus assuring that the academy students do not represent a more selective group.

Students at high risk for dropping out attend school more regularly, complete more courses and are less likely to leave school before graduating.

MDRC confirms that the academies "provide their students and teachers with a greater degree of institutional and interpersonal support than is available to their non-Academy counterparts in the same comprehensive high schools." An early report noted significantly more positive student attitudes toward teacher and peer support, intrinsic motivation, and the relevance of schoolwork. Academy teachers were more likely than their counterparts to believe they belonged to a strong professional community. According to a report released in February 2000, Academies were especially effective for students least likely to perform well in high school. Compared with their counterparts who were not in Career Academies, dropout rates among these students were reduced by one-third. These students also attended school more consistently and completed more courses than a comparable group not in Career Academies. For other students, academies also produced beneficial results, but more modest than for those at high risk of dropping out. Students' standardized test scores in math

and reading did not improve relative to students not in academies.

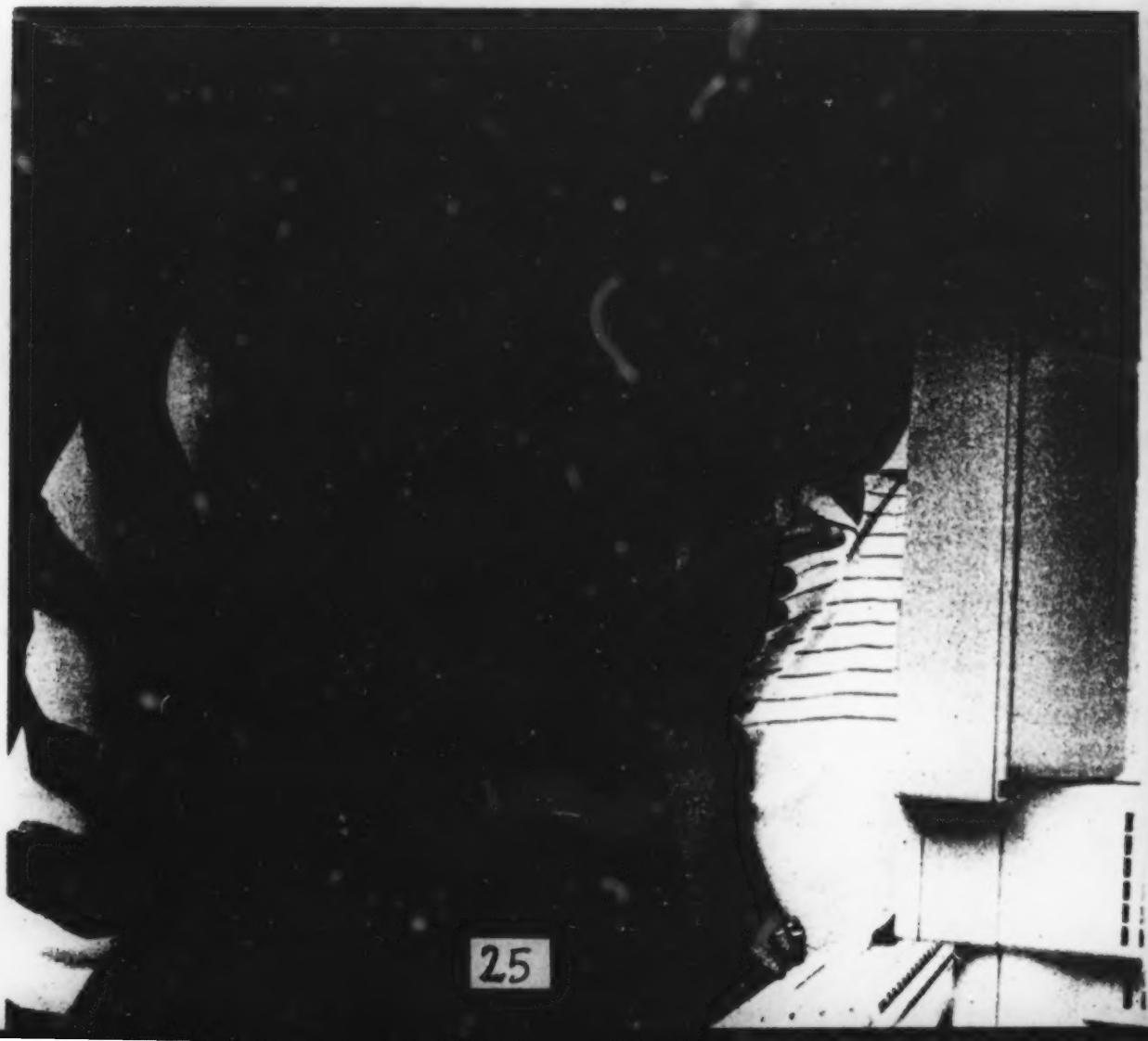
MDRC is currently developing guidelines for educators and policymakers on how to structure and support career academies. Although these programs tend to be "homegrown" and locally cultivated, say the MDRC researchers, they can benefit from outside support and knowledge, including federal, state, and regional entities. Most important, the MDRC research studies provide a firm basis on which to target technical assistance efforts designed to help academies sustain their strengths, but become more effective in improving academic skills.

CASN's work with new and evolving career academies reveals some basic concerns. According to David Stern, "finding the right teachers and keeping the team together" can be difficult in a school with high turnover, and developing an alternative schedule within a larger school is a challenge. CASN provides information to address these and other practical problems, and its website includes a list of active academies that others can contact. (Information is also available from the New York City-based National Academy Foundation, the other leading support network for academies, which has developed widely used models in finance, travel and tourism, and public service.)

Stern cautions against developing career academies too rapidly. He says that a number of questions must be addressed first. What happens to the special "spirit" when every student and teacher within a school must choose an academy? Can local employers maintain the quality of their partnerships? Will academies continue to be places where low-performing students can get special attention, or will academies begin tracking students? Continuing work by CASN and MDRC will help to provide answers to these and other questions.

Communities and Schools for Career Success (CS²)

Corporation for Business, Work and Learning



I think career development is one of the wedges that help communities make learning more enticing and exciting. But that said, we leave a lot of the work of figuring this out to communities. There are specific outcomes they must buy into, but how they get there is up to them.

EPHRAIM WEISSTEIN
Director, Center for Youth Development and Education
Corporation for Business, Work and Learning.

Because of CS^2, we have begun to link our reforms within the community and to integrate how we do our work. We are engaged in broad, systemic reforms. Career development is like a lightning bolt for change because it helps us be very clear about what we expect children to learn and design ways to make learning come alive for children.

PETER NEGRONI
Superintendent of Schools, Springfield, Massachusetts

Communities and Schools for Career Success (CS²) creates partnerships among schools, community organizations and businesses that strengthen education and career development for middle and high school students. These partnerships provide schools with expertise about the world of work as well as mentoring and other direct support to students. Change agents called "Entrepreneurs" are trained by CS² to assist each partnership to implement their plans. The entrepreneurs train school staff, develop work-based learning experiences, and encourage school reorganization using career themes; they also raise funds and help organizations integrate education and career preparation. CS² is a program of the Corporation for Business, Work and Learning (CBWL), a Boston-based nonprofit organization established to strengthen the workforce in Massachusetts.

Programs that connect schools and communities are popular with reformers, especially in low-income communities, but Communities and Schools for Career Success (CS²) goes a few steps further. The program focuses on connecting schools and communities to support the transition of young people from school to the adult world. It also concentrates on helping schools and communities develop the capacity to create their own programs rather than building a specific model. Research and field experience convinced the developers of CS² that "the only strategies that are implemented effectively and institutionalized over the long term are those that are developed and implemented locally and that create new relationships among the stakeholders."

CS² operates within six Massachusetts communities, primarily through teams of "entrepreneurs" assigned to each. Working at the middle and high school levels, the entrepreneurs assist community partners—students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and representatives from business, higher education, cultural institutions, government agencies, and community-based agencies—to build programs and systems that strengthen career and academic learning.

Essential Components

Each CS² site pursues a unique strategy for assisting young people in the transition from school to the adult world, yet all share these common features:

- A coherent career development strategy that will enable youth to move through a sequence of age-appropriate programs and opportunities.
- Curriculum and instructional reform, especially the integration of work-related skills into academic instruction.
- A support network of social services and enrichment programs (including health and mental health services, social work, counseling, tutoring, and mentoring), as well as the involvement of parents.

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Teams of entrepreneurs help groups in the participating communities implement programs by bringing together essential partners, helping them to plan, raising funds, and assisting implementation. The Corporation for Business, Work and Learning (CBWL) combines top-down, state-level policymaking with bottom-up, local capacity building. A quasi-public, state-wide organization charged with making policies more responsive to changing workplace needs, CBWL is governed by a board appointed by the governor and includes senior government officials and private-sector leaders representing education and economic development. Its work cuts across several state agencies including education, workforce development and youth services.

The origins of today's work go back nearly a decade. Recognizing that career development efforts in schools should start earlier, CBWL began in the early 1990s to study youth development and ask how public schools could ensure that young people are ready for the workplace. They concluded that, although many people knew what to do, capacity was lacking at the local level to carry through and make efforts permanent. In 1993 and 1995, with grants from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and others, CBWL selected six Massachusetts communities to become CS^2 sites: Amherst/Northampton, Barnstable, Boston, Brockton, Fitchburg/Leominster, and Springfield. (CBWL ended its partnership with Fitchburg/Leominster at the end of 1997 and brought New Bedford into the network in 1999.)

The CS^2 sites began by selecting their entrepreneurs, who then worked with the local partnerships and CBWL to create detailed plans and timetables. Overall, the partnerships undertook literally hundreds of activities, some affecting small groups of students and others—particularly as the sites matured—affecting entire grades and schools. These included career days, curriculum improvements in math and science, staff development for teachers and business partners, and collaborations with federal- and state-supported efforts, all with an emphasis on youth development. All sites use community service learning for personal, academic, and career development; in Boston, it is a major strategy of the CS^2 initiative at all seven participating middle schools.

According to Ephraim Weisstein, who heads its youth efforts, CBWL invests a lot in training entrepreneurs, who, in turn, train local leaders and educators in youth development.

Real-Life Portrait: The Broad Reach of Local Entrepreneurs

In Brockton, Mass., the 3,000-student high school is not the only institution that has been fundamentally changed by the CS² entrepreneur team. The reach of the entrepreneurs has extended to all the city's middle schools and even to the Regional Employment Board.

After a CS² entrepreneur wrote a successful grant proposal for a state School-to-Work (STW) grant, the entrepreneur team began piloting STW models for the region. At Brockton High School, for example, all 1,000 incoming freshmen worked with the guidance department to collect career portfolios, and 700 students were matched with 285 employers according to their career interests. The CS² team helped English teachers tie job shadowing assignments to a descriptive writing unit, now part of the standard freshman English curriculum. Overall, Brockton's CS² entrepreneurs enabled some 1,200 students to participate in work-based learning or career exploration in the first two years of the project. According to Maureen Murray, an STW regional director, "You really need a position like the CS² entrepreneur to make school-to-work happen." With this lesson in mind, she provided funds to other districts to employ STW liaisons.

Another project organized by the entrepreneurs was the Summer of Work and Learning, which places students in workplace learning situations that meet the recommendations of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). The CS² team also helped Brockton High School undertake major restructuring to align the curriculum with broad "career pathways." As a result, teachers and administrators have been studying project-based learning in three areas—work-based, school-based, and community service—and developing new teaching strategies drawn from applied learning methods.

At Brockton's four middle schools, the entrepreneurs organize career exploration opportunities for students and help teachers develop new instructional strategies that include career or community connections. The entrepreneur team wrote a winning grant proposal to manage the Brockton After-School Initiative, with input from a broad community partnership involving schools, community members, churches, and government agencies. The highly successful program now operates in all 21 school buildings during afterschool hours and offers evening events for families, such as math and science nights and family trips. By the 1997-98 school year, the After-School Initiative was being funded by the city and the school district.

Another effort of the entrepreneurs—school-linked health and human services—is also developing a permanent financial base, having earned the support of

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the Brockton Neighbors United, Health Department, and School Committee.

Assessing Progress and Meeting Challenges

In each community, CS^2 has generated multi-sector partnerships that bring schools and communities together in support of career development activities. By the end of 1997, CS^2 had recruited the participation of almost 300 leaders across the state, including representatives of 127 private companies, 14 institutions of higher education, and 43 community-based organizations. The partnerships have a greater impact than previous programs, which typically required little from businesses beyond an occasional speaker or donated equipment.

CBWL has documented a tremendous increase in student participation in career-related activities in the CS^2 sites and participation in part-time or summer work-based learning experiences.

An unanticipated outcome is the impact of the CS^2 program on state policymaking and practices at non-CS^2 sites. The four sites that entered the program in 1993 started their work before the state received its federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act grant, putting them "head and shoulders" above most other applicants for grant money, according to an evaluation of CS^2 by the Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University. Its report noted that the benefits of CS^2 extend far beyond its communities: "This experience has provided other Massachusetts communities with concrete examples of ways to translate school-to-work rhetoric into reality." In particular, the researchers cite the success of CS^2 in "building local school-to-work partnerships...[that] engage the business community and get them to work closely with school officials."

State officials also credit CS^2 sites with showing how to integrate school-to-work and school reform efforts. Says one, "The CS^2 communities are the one place in the state where the crosswalks between education reform programs really come out. These communities really do the collaboration; they don't simply agonize." This reputation has put CBWL in a strong position to influence state policy initiatives. Most encouraging, says Ephraim Weisstein, is the willingness of local communities to take on financial responsibility for CS^2. When the project began, the Funds provided 85 percent of the cost of entrepreneurs for the six communities. Their support now equals 33 percent, as local leaders have come to see the project as "a major piece of their overall reform efforts," and the state legislature has made a commitment of funds to the project. A new $1.3 million grant from the Fund is expanding the project within Massachusetts and to California.

Benchmark Communities Initiative

Jobs for the Future, Inc.

"I fear that high-stakes testing, narrow accountability and greater use of retention are going to push a lot more kids out of the system. A few years from now there will be much greater willingness to look at innovations such as school-to-career to repair the mistakes. I feel we need to stay the course, keep on implementing and refining and measuring what we do. There will be a bigger audience for our work in the future."

HILARY PENNINGTON
President, Jobs for the Future

BCI was extremely valuable to us as we began to scale up School-to-Career in Philadelphia, especially because School-to-Career has been an important part of our comprehensive educational reform effort. It provided a forum around best practices and lessons learned for us to share ideas, information and just plain collegial support with cities that were doing similar ground-breaking work.

DAVID A. HORNBECK
Former Superintendent, School District of Philadelphia

The Benchmark Communities Initiative (BCI) was started in 1994 by Jobs for the Future to improve the economic and career prospects of young people in four urban districts: Boston, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, and Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky. Over four years, Jobs for the Future aided those districts and their community partners in designing and implementing an academically rigorous school-to-career system and in building mechanisms for assessing progress. In 1998, the Connected Learning Communities network was established, building on the goals of BCI and expanding to 11 urban and suburban communities. Jobs for the Future is based in Boston, Massachusetts.

The Benchmark Communities Initiative (BCI) has never shrunk from challenges. From 1994 to 1998, it sought to transform the experiences of young people in some of the most formidable settings: four large, urban school systems. The recently concluded four-year project focused on two overarching goals: helping all students achieve higher academic performance by learning challenging subject matter and solving real-world problems; and improving young people's career prospects by mobilizing employers and other community allies to create pathways to higher education and high skill employment.

As Jobs for the Future (JFF) president Hilary Pennington puts it, "Building more effective education systems in a fast-changing economy requires changes in pedagogy and learning. Students need to be educated for understanding, which means they need more opportunities for experiential learning." She adds, however, that even if schools did this perfectly, "we would only be half-way to where we need to go." Students also need "rational and accessible opportunity structures" that help them move from high school to further education and careers."

Essential Components

BCI and its successor, the Connected Learning Communities (CLC) network, sought to enhance the educational and economic outcomes of young people in the four cities through coordinated, community-level change. Their work is guided by three principles:

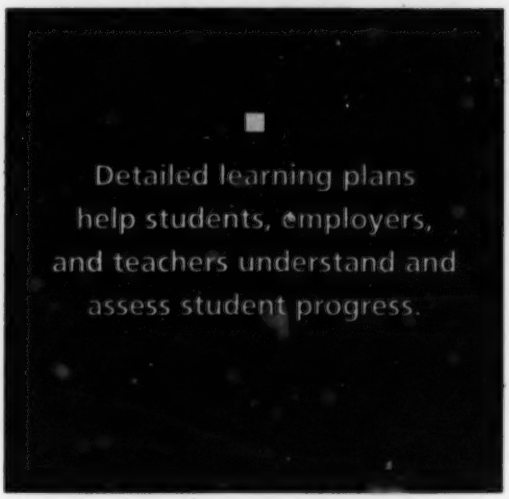
- The structure and mission of high schools should be reformed to create smaller and more supportive "learning communities," interweave career themes in the standard curriculum, improve vocational programs, and integrate new technologies.
- Employers should play a larger role in providing work-based learning opportunities for students and should cultivate a stronger presence in high schools. The school system should seek to understand and adapt to the realities of the labor market.
- Community-wide governance structures and partnerships are needed to facilitate innovation and exchange and to maximize the resources available to young people.

In Philadelphia, for example, the school district interwove career themes in the high school curriculum, restructured the city's comprehensive high schools into more manageable "small learning communities," and integrated SCANS-type competencies into the district's content learning standards. The district created the Office of Education for Employment to revamp vocational programs and assume broader responsibility for managing school-to-career efforts.

In Boston, the Private Industry Council (PIC) had long played an active role in linking schools with local businesses, but that role expanded in the early 1990s with the creation of more intensive programs at some schools. PIC provides each high school with at least one career specialist, who arranges placements for students in local worksites. These site-based efforts are augmented by a small, centralized marketing staff that finds and coordinates new placement options. A detailed learning plan for each student helps all parties—student, employer, and teachers—understand and assess the skills and abilities to be developed through a work-based learning experience. Boston's School-to-Career Steering Committee, made up of key business, education, government, labor, and community leaders, is responsible for monitoring as well as promoting this and other school-to-career programs.

Real-Life Portrait: Peanuts along the Career Pathway

It's almost the end of the school year, a time when most high school juniors would be thinking of other things: summer plans, senior year, almost anything except growing peanuts. But in Russ Cook's chemistry class at Brighton High School, one of eight Boston schools involved with JFF's Benchmark Communities Initiative, students are engrossed in



hydroponically grown peanuts. Most are enrolled in Brighton's Health Careers Pathway program, and Cook has arranged for them to be linked with Tuskegee University and the National Aeronautical and Space Administration in a project to explore growing nitrogen-fixing crops in a water-based medium. This is something the colonizers of space will need to know how to do to create artificial environments in which to nurture plants for food.

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Students prepare the hydroponic solution, germinate the plants, set up computer programs to analyze data, and maintain communications with Tuskegee University science faculty. The contacts are unique and welcome to students in an inner-city high school. The students enjoy the class immensely. "We're learning teamwork, leadership, analysis," one student tells a visitor. Another explains, "We're integrating different subjects: trigonometry, biology, English, physics."

This example illustrates the changes in learning environments sought by BCI and its successor, the CLC network. In Boston, the school-to-career emphasis promoted by these programs has become a major tool for education reform. After several years of groundwork, the district adopted a comprehensive high school reform initiative in 1997-98, requiring all high schools to redesign their instructional and organizational practices by 2000. The plan is based on a comprehensive framework for reform developed by a High School Restructuring Task Force, for which JFF staff provided technical assistance.

Jobs for the Future also provided assistance to help Boston's Private Industry Council enhance learning in the workplace. JFF staff helped representatives of the district's Office of Education for Employment, the PIC, and key business partners reach a consensus on competencies students should learn in work settings, including communicating and understanding ideas and information, identifying and solving problems, and initiating and completing entire projects.

Assessing Progress and Meeting Challenges

The school districts in Philadelphia and Boston have collected preliminary evidence that their school-to-career efforts are making an impact on students. In Philadelphia, eleventh and twelfth graders in paid work-based learning programs had an attendance rate of 85.4 percent in 1997-98, compared with 80 percent in those grades districtwide, while the respective dropout rates were 1.3 percent and 12 percent. Among work-based learning students, graduation rates were 87 percent, compared with 72 percent for all students. Boston has similar results. Students in career pathways had significantly lower dropout rates, higher attendance rates, better grades, and higher promotion rates than their peers. A recent PIC survey showed that graduates of its intensive school-to-career program, Tech Prep, were more likely than comparable graduates to attend college during the year after graduation (78 percent versus 72 percent), be employed (87 percent versus 75 percent), and receive higher wages.

The other two urban sites have experienced less forward movement. Milwaukee, after a change in superintendents, has abandoned its plan to use school-to-work as its major reform engine, although remnants of the attempt are continuing under differ-

ent names. In Louisville/Jefferson County, the superintendent has shifted priorities to focus on literacy.

The reasons school-to-career efforts have taken root in Boston and Philadelphia while remaining somewhat marginalized in Milwaukee and Louisville/Jefferson County are both structural and cultural, according to JFF President Pennington. "When we started this work in the early 1990s, we thought the country could move quickly into systems built on school-to-career ideas, that employers would step up to the plate, and that schools would really get into teaching kids in different ways," she said. "Culturally, however, the country is confused about what it means to prepare young people well. It is very hard to move opinion—and hence community systems—from seeing school-to-career efforts as a form of vocational education for 'less capable' students to seeing it as a legitimate vehicle for stronger academics and more seamless workforce transitions for all students."

In Boston and Philadelphia, a vision of a school-to-career continuum for all students developed gradually. Over the past several years, two school reform leaders—Boston Superintendent Thomas Payzant and Philadelphia's former Superintendent David Hornbeck—have put forth change agendas that fit well with school-to-career structures already in place. This convergence has meant that career development efforts have had the benefits of time and high-level support in which to grow and develop. Business also played a crucial role in these communities by arranging work-based learning opportunities for students and providing vocal support for the new directions. In Boston, the local PIC took on the role of representing Boston's business community, and in that role brokered work-based learning placements throughout the city, providing coherence and coordination as the program expanded.

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National Association of Service and Conservation Corps

The Youth Corps enables young people to contribute valuable environmental restoration on public lands while building upon their own personal academic and marketable work skills. These programs instill a strong sense of accomplishment among the youth who participate while contributing a valuable resource to our public lands. I could not be a stronger supporter of these efforts.

SENATOR JEFF BINGAMAN
Democrat, New Mexico

We have collectively had a chance to positively influence the lives of 20,000 young people a year, giving them access to a second chance. However, we cannot accomplish anything permanent without programs that put quality first.

KATHLEEN SELZ
President, National Association of Service and Conservation Corps

The National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) assists youth corps throughout the country in working with low-income young people who have left school with inadequate skills, and often without a diploma. Reminiscent of the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps, youth corps are local organizations that provide environmental improvement and other services in their communities, while also offering work experience, education, skills training, and counseling to 16-25 year olds. Currently, about 110 youth corps annually serve more than 20,000 young people, most from low-income communities. Through its National Youth Corps Training Program, NASCC helps leaders and staff to apply best practices, increase and diversify their funding, and contract with their communities to provide needed services. Founded in 1985, NASCC is based in Washington, DC.

Launched in California in 1976, the contemporary youth service and conservation corps movement grew slowly but steadily, attracting advocates, practitioners, and funders committed to youth development, especially for minority or low-income young people struggling to create a better future for themselves. The combination of education, job and life skills training, and community service opportunities that youth corps provided their enrollees proved to be a powerful influence on young people needing a second chance.

In 1992, the corps movement experienced a significant growth spurt, the result of an infusion of new federal funds through the National and Community Service Act of 1990. Knowing that youth corps often operate on a shoestring—both financially and organizationally—the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps (NASCC) initiated an intensive effort to help start-up and expanding programs. A survey revealed that youth corps tended to rely on internal expertise but wished to receive more and better staff development and information-sharing opportunities. The survey also showed that youth corps spend less than one percent of their operating budgets on staff development, considerably below private industry standards and far too little for a movement that was growing by leaps and bounds. Early in 1993, with new national service legislation on the horizon, NASCC established the National Youth Corps Training Program with support from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

Essential Components

NASCC's National Youth Corps Training Program operates according to three principles:

- Youth corps need technical assistance to secure their financial stability, public visibility, and programmatic quality. These services are especially important to new and expanding youth corps programs.
- The youth corps movement should foster an institutional ethic of investing in staff and organizational development.

- A great deal of expertise already exists within individual youth corps, and this knowledge should be captured, built on, and organized for the benefit of all.

NASCC has developed a range of methods for delivering technical assistance, including on-site consulting, structured site visits, retreats, publications, videos, and workshops on topics such as welfare reform, proposal writing, and environmental restoration. A cadre of "circuit riders," many of them veteran corps practitioners, provide specialized on-site help. Annual forums for corps directors are another key component for building leadership skills. According to NASCC president Kathleen Selz, "We are able to get everyone together to share best practice, emerging principles and community values—a better way to learn than reading a technical manual." In recent years, the annual gathering has covered high expectations and outcomes for young people, accountability, and tracking the progress of participants during and after their corps experience.

The work has paid off in remarkable growth. In Colorado, for example, where the first three youth corps programs began in 1992, the Colorado Youth Corps Association now oversees nine corps. Two additional communities are in the planning stages, and a regional corps to serve the southeastern plains is scheduled to begin in 2000. "Colorado started with three small, struggling programs," Selz recalls. "Today, we have a cadre of corps there that is sustainable, each one committed to high quality and each connected to one another and to national leadership."

Real-Life Portrait: Planting the Seeds in Colorado

When the youth corps movement began in Colorado in 1992, it did so quietly, filling a need in two counties and a Denver neighborhood for summer job experiences. Only a few dozen young people participated during the first year. Committed to making the three fledgling corps into a serious movement, NASCC provided help to the early organizers. The timing couldn't have been better. New state funding opportunities were emerging, and NASCC sent in consultants to help corps leadership take advantage of them.

With NASCC's assistance, Colorado's youth corps have garnered support from the Greater Outdoors Colorado lottery proceeds, local foundations, corporations, and a variety of state and federal funding sources. Today, the goal of the statewide youth corps organization, the Colorado Youth Corps Association (CYCA), is to serve 600 youth annually within three years, a significant increase over the 1999 total of 420. The 1999 budget for the nine operating youth corps and CYCA is $2.7 million.

The services NASCC provided to the youth corps in Colorado focused on more than money. At first, the director of training and technical assistance offered

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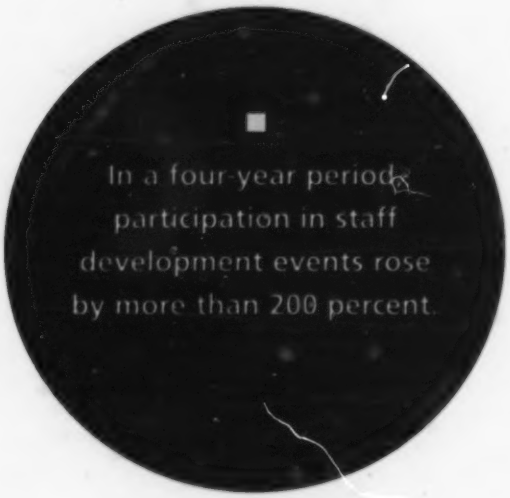
mentoring, both on-site and over the phone, on strengthening the programs, developing skills among staff and corps members, managing more efficiently, and diversifying funding. NASCC "circuit riders," experts capable of providing customized assistance, also visited the sites. During the first year, for example, circuit riders helped Denver's corps overcome problems with gangs and violence and improve its relationships with the Denver housing authority and police.



In a state renowned for its beautiful open country, the corps might be expected to focus on environmental projects in rural areas. On the contrary, although more than half of total service hours are spent on conservation and environmental tasks, 60 percent of that work takes place in urban and suburban areas. Other types of projects include recycling; building renovation and construction; human services for elderly people, children, the homeless, and others; and educational assistance, such as tutoring and serving as teachers' aides.

The impact of serving in a youth corps is often most dramatic when it involves a totally new experience for a young person. As one young woman who had never been outside the Denver city limits wrote, "When the sun sinks beneath the western horizon,...I look up and I am able to see 20 other team members working as much as me, working with every muscle and every ounce of strength they have, all for one common good: to protect, to stand firm, and to aid the natural areas of our community."

Assessing Progress and Meeting Challenges

An evaluation of the National Youth Corps Training Program by Policy Studies Associates showed that NASCC's capacity-building efforts have been effective. Between 1992 and 1996, the frequency of staff participation in professional development events increased by 200 percent or more. The quality of staff developers and information also improved, according to corps directors. One director explained that, unlike other providers, NASCC enables staff to be closely involved in shaping the training, which is then more relevant to their needs and concerns.

Although the study could not document that corps were spending a greater share of their budgets on professional development, it did find other evidence

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of consistent attention to building the capacity of staff. More than half of the respondents said they had improved their in-house capacity to meet staff development needs with higher-quality materials, more experienced staff, and more rigorous standards for content. They increased the amount of time dedicated to training and offered it to a broader range of staff positions. They also used more sophisticated means of determining training needs.

In some cases, corps directors credited NASCC with helping their programs survive. NASCC training enabled them to implement new components, seek new funding, learn what other corps were doing, and hone their administrative skills. Moreover, says the study, NASCC staff development substantially raised "staff morale, enthusiasm, and sense of membership in a collective effort."

During a time of unprecedented growth, NASCC's ability to modify its training program to fit changing needs is a tribute to its foresight and stable funding over several years. For example, NASCC originally planned to offer two extended off-site workshops a year for crew supervisors. But when it became apparent that supervisors can't be away from their workplaces for long periods, training became site specific. This way, site staff can particpate in training together, helping to build communication and strengthen teamwork. NASCC also followed up on needs expressed during a forum for corps directors by convening quarterly teleconferences on topics such as apprenticeship programs, forest service partnerships, and urban stream restoration. Looking ahead to a related challenges, NASCC recently received a $3.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to expand its work on helping young people make the transition from youth corps into employment and post-secondary education.

The Fund's investment in NASCC's training program (four grants between 1989 and 1997 totaling $1.95 million) helped the organization compete successfully for federal grants and cooperative agreements totaling $1.5 million. These grants had a domino effect, since NASCC was then able to help individual and state youth corps tap federal resources, take advantage of state programs, and develop fee-for-services contracts. Recently, NASCC obtained "corps-friendly" provisions in a new omnibus transportation act that provides $60 billion to states for transportation improvements, including trails. The legislation's mention of youth corps partnerships fits with "what corps do best," says Kathleen Selz, such as historic renovations and wetlands restoration. Developments like these have stabilized youth corps and given them hope for a long life.

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YouthBuild USA

The youth as spokespeople have been spectacularly successful in reaching across the great class divide. When they say they have found a purpose in life and tell that to people who never listened to them before, that makes an impression and counteracts the negativism of policymakers.

DOROTHY STONEMAN
President, YouthBuild USA

YouthBuild is the only national program that provides young adults an immediate, productive role in our community while also providing equal measures of education toward a diploma, skills training toward a decent job, leadership development toward civic engagement, adult mentorship toward overcoming personal problems. In Massachusetts and across the country, I have seen YouthBuild succeed in offering young people a positive set of values, a goal to which we should all be committed.

SENATOR JOHN F. KERRY
Democrat, Massachusetts

YouthBuild USA supports the implementation of its career development model for 16-24 year olds in low-income communities throughout the country. YouthBuild participants are young adults who have left school poorly prepared for work or further education. They gain skills by renovating housing in low-income neighborhoods, developing their capacity for leadership and studying to attain the next milestone in their education—for most, fulfilling GED requirements. Created during the 1970s in New York City's East Harlem neighborhood, YouthBuild now operates at more than 120 sites nationwide. The YouthBuild USA national office provides training, technical assistance and data management to local sites that agree to adhere to its standards of program quality and works with state and federal agencies to build recognition and support. YouthBuild USA is based in Somerville, Massachusetts.

YouthBuild USA defies the odds. In an era of cynicism about social and educational interventions, it proved the skeptics wrong about the renewal of youth who had dropped out of school. At a time when budget cuts to federal discretionary programs were all but certain, it received a substantial infusion of federal funding. When its federal financial base was suddenly reduced drastically, YouthBuild USA kept the movement going through sheer hard work and an ability to attract supporters with its vision and commitment. When the federal government moved to replicate YouthBuild without safeguarding the program's quality, YouthBuild USA stepped in and created a voluntary network dedicated to high standards of program implementation.

As conceived by Dorothy Stoneman, president and founder of YouthBuild USA, the program provides participants with academic instruction, job skills, and leadership development. The program focuses on construction trades, through which participants get the opportunity to build or rehabilitate housing in their neighborhoods and be paid above minimum wage. Its strength is the expertise and commitment of its site leaders, who offer worthwhile futures to young people who have been failed by other institutions. A 1997 study of 40 YouthBuild programs showed that participants are predominantly African-American and male. Many have been in trouble with the law: 21 percent of participants have been in the juvenile justice system, and 13 percent have been convicted of a felony. Nearly 80 percent enter the program without a high school or GED diploma. Almost half (43 percent) are parents.

Essential Components

To participate in the national network, local YouthBuild sites must agree to adopt a set of performance standards designed to assure the quality of the YouthBuild model. The standards set clear and high goals for key program outcomes including student attendance, retention in the program, placement and retention in further education and/or a job, edu-

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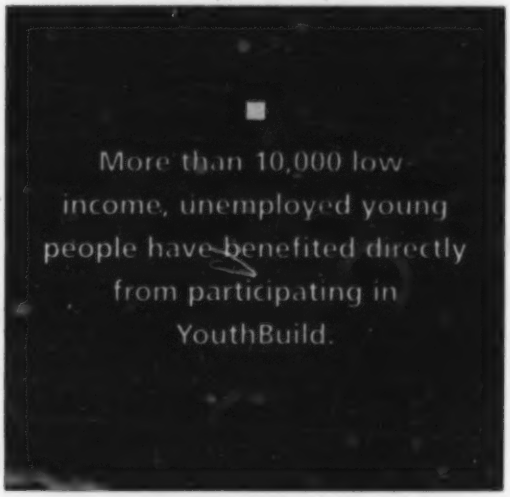
cational achievement, mastery of construction skills and leadership behavior—through activities that seek to benefit both the youth participants and the community.

These guidelines were developed in 1994 when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development expanded the successful YouthBuild program to more than 100 sites but rejected the idea of imposing a specific model on local groups. With approval from HUD, Stoneman established a voluntary network of sites committed to a quality control system based on well-defined performance standards. YouthBuild originally intended to enroll 40 sites, but the network has grown to 78 affiliates, including most of the sites funded by HUD in the fall of 1998.

The Funds have been a consistent supporter of YouthBuild, beginning in 1991 with a grant to help the program consider a strategy for expansion, before the model was adopted by HUD. Between 1994 and 1998, the Funds supported the development of the voluntary network with grants totaling $1.9 million. According to Stoneman, "The network is doing exactly what it was meant to do: producing commitment among local leaders, creating community nationally, sharing knowledge, training staff, developing wise policies, and upholding program design and performance standards."

By the end of 1997, YouthBuild USA tallied an impressive record over three years of expansion. According to the YouthBuild staff, "More than 10,000 low-income, out-of-school, unemployed, disconnected young people...have benefited directly through full-time participation in the YouthBuild program, and from the attention being given to the programs' quality." Approximately 8,000 low-income people, many of them formerly homeless, were living in the 2,000 homes built by program participants.



Real Life Portraits: The Voices of Young People

The YouthBuild St. Louis Program lasts 40 weeks and combines vocational and construction training with GED preparation and high school courses. Education materials are a lively mix of poetry, novels, and construction manuals. Regular conservation field trips enhance science instruction. Students are asked to aim higher than the GED, and encouraged to go on to

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college. YouthBuild cultivates students' comprehension and analytic skills, along with their sense of teamwork and leadership capacities.

Does the program make a difference? Listen to the voices of some young participants.

"You can't really classify dedication as a skill. But that's what I got out of it," says Marlo, who was just "hanging out all day" until he saw a flyer about YouthBuild St. Louis. He mastered skills that led to a job in carpentry, but he also learned about leadership and has become a valued member of the program's Policy Committee.

"Before the program, I didn't have any idea what I would be doing with my life at all. YouthBuild changed everything. They showed me much love, and I loved them back." This is Charles. He earned a GED while completing the YouthBuild program and received the Pursuit of Excellence Outstanding Student Award at his graduation.

"At YouthBuild, I learned about positive thinking and being responsible for your own actions. The most important thing in life is to be responsible for your actions." Kenny, a fourth-year apprentice working toward a certificate as an electrician journeyman, once spent three years in prison for gang activity. Now, he attends community college at night to earn a degree in electrical engineering.

"I was sitting at home doing nothing," says Sikina, a single mother with four children. She was on welfare before she enrolled in YouthBuild in 1994. Four years later, she was working on a degree in social work and serving on the YouthBuild USA national board of directors. "Once you get involved in YouthBuild, you find yourself loving the people you come in contact with. It's all one big family."

"I just hate the idea of leaving. This is like a home away from home. I've met friends I'll keep for a lifetime." This is Yvette, a mother of two who was depressed and without hope until she joined YouthBuild. She learned construction skills but also explored other career options. She received an AmeriCorps education award of more than $2,300 for 900 hours of community service and was a proud member of a construction team that earned a Preservation Week award.

Assessing Progress and Meeting Challenges

YouthBuild is using support from a recent Fund grant to develop data-collection and reporting systems for helping network affiliates identify strengths and weaknesses and make improvements. So far, the affiliated sites have shown distinctly higher outcomes than other YouthBuild sites on such measures as number of trainees, retention rates, length of participation, percentage receiving GEDs, placements in jobs or school, average wage, number of housing units completed, and amount of non-HUD funds raised. The network's track record has earned it wide respect, and YouthBuild is developing materials to

share with other career and youth development organizations. It also has won strong support in Congress. In 1999, half the members of the Senate and 113 members of the House of Representatives signed a letter calling for a 75 percent increase in funding for YouthBuild.

Local YouthBuild programs are also showing meaningful results. In St. Louis, 90 percent of a recent class of 30 remained in the program for the full 40 weeks, with a 94 percent attendance rate. Of those who finished, 89 percent earned GEDs, and the same percentage got full-time jobs or went on to college or technical school. Those in jobs earned an average hourly wage of $8.22. Since the St. Louis program began in 1992, it has rehabilitated 35 units of affordable housing in low-income neighborhoods. This year, participants are constructing the first new energy-efficient, owner-occupied composite structures for low-income families.

Stoneman's vision for the program has remained constant, as has her explanation for why YouthBuild is needed: lack of political interest in changing "the conditions of poverty and the inequality of the structures of opportunity in this country." By demanding quality in YouthBuild programs, she hopes to win over "the largest and broadest coalition of powerful people who will support a vision of a society with equal opportunity."

New Roles for Youth-Serving Organizations:
Lessons for Programs and Policymakers

One premise of the Fund's career development work is that institutions, not young people, have failed to keep pace with the needs of the workforce. These institutions must assume new roles if they are to make best use of public money and create better futures for the millions of young people in their care.

The transformation takes time—time to build up the capacities of teachers and other adults, to reflect and evaluate, and to garner policy support in localities and states. Like other private grantmakers, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund possesses the flexibility to support innovations over time, provide laboratories for testing ideas, then evaluate and report on the results. The effort has borne fruit. Ten years and significant concentrated investments have helped good ideas to grow into programs affecting thousands of young people. Through this work, the Fund has identified key elements of successful programs as well as barriers that must be addressed. A few lessons stand out:

- CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES FIT WELL WITH THE GREATER RIGOR CURRENTLY BEING DEMANDED OF PUBLIC EDUCATION. The programs build skills often not addressed in the traditional academic content areas, in applying what students know and solving complex problems. These skills are relevant for all students, especially when they enter the workplace. Career development experiences often engage the interest of students because they connect with students' lives and aspirations.

- CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS CAN BE A LEVER TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING WITHIN SECONDARY SCHOOLS. A number of high schools are using aspects of career development to transform their entire programs. Career academies and pathways, applied learning strategies, and focused professional development are some of the mechanisms being used to encourage broader change.

- HIGH QUALITY IMPLEMENTATION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THESE PROGRAMS. To be effective, career development programs must be intense and sustained. Programs must carefully integrate philosophy, staff expertise, external partnerships, close attention to student development and evaluation.

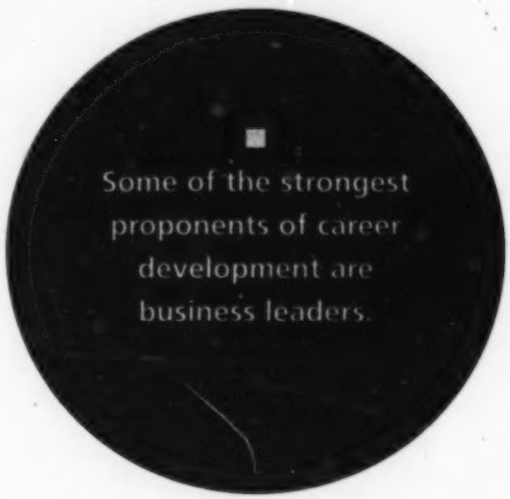
- GOOD PROGRAMS REQUIRE GOOD LEADERSHIP. Every program must be able to build the capacity of its staff to integrate youth development approaches into the practices of its staff. This requires hiring strong leaders and developing leadership from within.

- **SCHOOLS, YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYERS, AND POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS MUST COLLABORATE AND JOIN LARGER STATE AND FEDERAL REFORM EFFORTS.** Partnerships help schools and youth programs understand the challenges that will be faced by young people, while also helping students anticipate what will be expected of them. Plus, by linking their own work with that of broader reform efforts, local programs can improve the quality of their offerings and take better advantage of funding opportunities.

- **LOCAL AND NATIONAL INTERMEDIARY ORGANIZATIONS ARE VITAL TO YOUTH CAREER DEVELOPMENT.** These organizations have the ability to identify and disseminate information about good practice and provide assistance to local sites. Schools, districts, agencies, and state offices need help in seeing how schools can be organized differently or link to community resources.

- **PUBLIC SECTOR INVESTMENT IN YOUTH CAREER DEVELOPMENT IS ESSENTIAL.** Community organizations and private foundations can get the ball rolling, but they do not have the resources to generate fundamental, long-term improvement. Effective programs will not last without public support.

Because the career development field is relatively young and limited funds have been available for evaluation, we know less than we would like about how extensively these programs have affected student outcomes in the workplace and post-secondary education. We do know, however, that some programs improve student retention and performance and lead to a higher graduation rate. And we know that the programs can be implemented in a variety of settings, which bodes well for their replication.



In fact, perhaps the most important lesson is the power of career development to affect the larger landscape of youth opportunities, especially policymaking. Although they operate in local situations, the programs are connected through their intermediary organizations to larger trends and priorities. Many programs have been featured at briefings for Capitol Hill staff and other government or education leaders. The American Youth Policy Forum, which sponsors some of these briefings, has also described several of the programs in its reports on successful youth devel-

opment programs from which the Senate framed youth policies in the new Workforce Investment Act.

Career development programs are not without critics. Some view school-to-career initiatives as narrowing choices for young people, funneling them into job-specific tracks and minimizing attention to basic or intellectual skills. They believe school-to-work programs are government-sponsored intrusions upon the freedom of students to choose their own academic paths.

Yet some of the strongest proponents of better school-to-work transitions have been business leaders who favor a deeper and broader academic background for the upcoming workforce, not a narrower one. Career development and school-to-work programs, according to leadership groups such as the Business Roundtable and the Committee for Economic Development, integrate higher academic skills with applied learning. Furthermore, business leaders argue, school-based and work-based learning reinforce each other, providing incentives for students to complete high school and prepare for post-secondary education.

The six programs covered in this report demonstrate that career development has the potential to meet the expectations of community and business leaders and others concerned with the prospects of American young people. These programs help youth understand their interests and focus on career choices. Though the programs described here approach career development differently, all add up to a clear message: young people, particularly those who struggle in the traditional educational system, can move more assuredly into the future if their schools and other institutions prepare them with thoughtful, connected, and challenging experiences.

Perhaps the final word should come from a young person. Serena Hillman, at the time a participant in YouthBuild Seattle, told a group of adults: "YouthBuild not only gives us a second chance, which we desperately need, but it gives society a chance to realize that people can change. Society needs that."

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Appendix

DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Career Preparation and Exploration

Contacts

Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds
Peter Kleinbard
Program Officer
Two Park Avenue, 23rd Floor
New York, NY 10016
(212) 251-9700

Benchmark Communities
Marlene Seltzer
Executive Vice-President
Jobs for the Future, Inc.
88 Broad Street
Boston, MA 02110
(617) 728-4446

Career Academies
David Stern
Director
The Career Academy Support Network
2030 Addison Street
Suite 500
Berkeley, CA 94720
(510) 642-2058

Communities and Schools for Career Success
Ephraim Weisstein
Vice-President
Center for Youth Development and Education
Corporation for Business, Work and Learning
The Schrafft Center
529 Main Street, Suite 110
Boston, MA 02129
(617) 727-8158

High Schools That Work
James E. Bottoms
Senior Vice President
The Southern Regional Education Board
592 Tenth Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 875-9211

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
Robert Ivry
Senior Vice President
16 E. 34th Street
New York, NY 10016
(212) 532-3200

National Association of Service and Conservation Corps
Kathleen Selz
President
666 11th Street, NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 727-6272

YouthBuild USA, Inc.
Dorothy Stoneman
President
58 Day Street
Somerville, MA 02144
(617) 623-9900

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Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds

DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund
Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

Two Park Avenue, 23rd Floor
New York, NY 10016
Tel: 212 251-9700
Fax: 212 679-6990

Email: wrdf@wallacefunds.org
www.wallacefunds.org

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